

Research Notes

Scientology's Interfaith and Charitable Work in South Africa

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ABSTRACT: Unlike in other countries, the Church of Scientology enjoys a largely positive image in South Africa. Anti-cult campaigns do exist in the country, but Scientology has never been one of their main targets. One reason is the effectiveness of Scientology Volunteer Ministers' disaster relief activities, in a country where governmental agencies are plagued by endemic corruption. Another is the massive interfaith effort that has led to agreements with hundreds of religious organizations, whose bishops, pastors, and other leaders are trained by Scientologists through programs aimed at improving their communication and management skills, while no effort is made to "convert" them to Scientology. Most Scientology Volunteer Ministers in South Africa are not Scientologists. Interfaith and volunteer work does improve the public image of Scientology, but non-Scientologists who participate in it mostly praise its positive results.

KEYWORDS: Church of Scientology, Scientology in South Africa, Scientology Volunteer Ministers, Tools for Life, Scientology's Interfaith Activities.

Soft Drinks and New Religious Movements: The Saga of the Mc Col

It was a bright summer day in the Southern Hemisphere, December 9, 2023, in the park in front of the University of Cape Town. Thousands of people had gathered for a non-competitive Peace and Health Walk to celebrate the launch of

a new drink called Mc Col that promised to take the African continent by storm. We were both in attendance. Yet, we are not particularly interested in how soft drinks are marketed. But this was a gathering we could not miss.

Presiding the event was Dr. Samuel Radebe, the IMboni (something more than a prophet) of one of the largest South African new religious movements, The Revelation Spiritual Home, calling Africans to rediscover African traditional, pre-Christian and pre-Islamic, spirituality (Introvigne and Šorytè 2023). Radebe also operates a number of commercial companies whose aim is both to support his movement and to lift his devotees out of poverty, eventually allowing them to start their own small businesses.

One of these companies import and distributes Mc Col into South Africa and nearby countries. Next to Radebe, who was wearing the traditional cheetah skin hat of African chiefs, Asian executives with their customary Westernized dark jackets and ties appeared on the podium. They had come to South Africa to represent the South Korean manufacturer of the Mc Col drink, a company belonging to the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, once known as the Unification Church. Some of them introduced themselves as “Reverend” and paid their respects to Radebe in the name of their religion’s leader, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the widow of Reverend Sun Myung Moon (1920–2012).

Seated at a table in the park, leaders of the Church of Scientology from South Africa and abroad cheered the event. They had trained a number of executives of The Revelation Spiritual Home through their *Tools for Life* program, and some of them looked forward to applying what they had learned from Scientology to the sale of Mc Col.

When we reported to some colleagues, specialized in the study of new religious movements, what we had witnessed in Cape Town as exceptional, they commented that it was not particularly new. New religious movements regularly cooperate between themselves within the framework of religious liberty coalitions to resist anti-cult campaigns, and most of them also participate in interfaith initiatives. In fact, these colleagues had missed our point entirely—or perhaps we had not explained it clearly enough. What happened in Cape Town on December 9, 2023, had nothing to do with religious freedom alliances or inter-religious dialogue. The aim was strictly to sell a soft drink. The uniqueness of the event was in putting together three very different new religious movements for a commercial venture. The Unification Church produces the Mc Col in South

Korea. The Revelation Spiritual Home distributes it in Africa. Scientology, although not involved in the Mc Col venture, trains executives of The Revelation Spiritual Home to acquire skills they can use both in their religious and commercial activities.

Anti-Cultism in South Africa: Scientology Is Not a Main Target

On the other hand, the Mc Col alliance happened because the three movements had learned to cooperate within each other for purposes other than selling soft drinks. Just one day before the McCol event, we attended the foundation meeting of the African Forum for Religious Liberty and Spirituality (AFRLS), the African section of FOREF, the Forum for Religious Freedom Europe, of which Radebe had been elected coordinator with a Scientologist serving as deputy coordinator (Introvigne 2023). Present at the event was also a member of the Family Federation (ex Unification Church) who is Executive Director of FOREF in Vienna, together with representatives of dozens of other religions present in South Africa, both newly established and mainline.

The establishment of AFRLS, and the large number of religious leaders who gathered for its launching event, could be interpreted as a response to an awareness that anti-cultism, as a global phenomenon, is also expanding to South Africa. One of the consequences of anti-cultism is that the massive charitable and humanitarian work some new religious movements perform goes unrecognized.

Eileen Barker once wrote that “one does not often see reports of the charitable work in which many of the NRMs [new religious movements] engage,” even if it is sometimes “outstanding” (Barker 2020, 538). That this happens, is evidence of the phenomenon social scientists call “gatekeeping” (Barzilai-Nahon 2008, 2009). For different reasons, the media filters out news that do not correspond to certain agendas or established stereotypes. “Cults” are by definition malignant, and gatekeeping works to exclude information that would contradict this prejudice.

Gatekeeping, however, does not always work. In 2020, one of us (Šorytė) conducted research about how the Church of Scientology was reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic. She interviewed Scientologists and others and examined

dozens of press clippings and media reports from several countries (Šoryté 2020).

She came to three conclusions. First, Scientology had developed an impressive range of activities on a worldwide basis, both spreading information about preventive measures and offering practical help such as distributing masks and sanitizing public spaces. Second, opponents of Scientology had dismissed even this admirable and effective activity as mere propaganda, a typical example of gatekeeping. Some specialized media are devoted exclusively to perpetuate the stereotypes about the “cults,” and to attack those, including scholars, who dare to report positive information about these movements. Confronted with the fact that, during the 2020 pandemic, Scientology and its Volunteer Ministers performed significant and positive charitable deeds and helped the population in a moment of deep crisis, anti-cult media reacted by raising doubts about the Scientologists' motivations, and even ridiculing them with a violent language—which, in this case, was also distasteful and offensive towards the victims of the pandemic and those who tried to help them. The verbal violence was also intended to serve notice that, should some media or others lower the gate and allow positive information about Scientology to be published, they will also be attacked.

The third conclusion, however, was that there was a country where these forms of aggressive gatekeeping were not working, Scientology's anti-COVID activities were represented for what they were, and the coverage was surprisingly positive and immune from the usual anti-cult stereotypes. That country was South Africa.

Later, after the worst phase of COVID-19 subsided, we visited South Africa twice and interviewed representatives of the Church of Scientology there. We noticed that the climate was very much different from Europe, particularly in France where hostility to Scientology is, as the French would say, “de rigueur” in most media circles. Not in South Africa, though, where Scientology was generally referred to with respect.

This was even more interesting as in South Africa campaigns against “cults” have been conducted for several years, targeting various Christian new religious movements and others promoting traditional African spirituality, with the support of some politicians. A governmental agency called Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (in short, CRL), had conducted in 2015–2016 an investigation on the abuse of

religion, and had published in 2017 a controversial report using typical anti-cult language (CRL Rights Commission 2017). One of the criticisms we raised ourselves against the report (Introvigne and Šorytė 2023) is that, as it admitted, it identified what religious groups should be investigated based on “controversial news reports and articles in the media” (CRL Rights Commission 2017, 4). This meant that the media dictated the agenda of a governmental commission, which did not ask itself whether some reports may be biased or conditioned by the hostility towards certain groups.

Be it as it may be, the report targeted dozens of religious movements active in South Africa but did not mention at all the Church of Scientology. This was an indication that “controversial news reports and articles in the media” on Scientology were either non-existing or not particularly important in the country. The reason was not that Scientology was not active nor visible in South Africa. On the contrary, the first Church of Scientology was established in Johannesburg in 1957, and the founder of the religion himself, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), spent time in South Africa in the late 1960s (Church of Scientology International 2024). Later, a magnificent private mansion called Castle Kyalami in Midrand, near Johannesburg, was bought to become the headquarters of Scientology for the whole continent of Africa and inaugurated on January 1, 2019 (Church of Scientology in South Africa 2024).

The anti-cult movement is in its essence transnational, and hostile literature was available in South Africa, yet it failed to have a significant impact there. What are the reasons of this difference between South Africa and other countries?

The Effectiveness of Scientology’s Disaster Relief

One reason explaining why the Church of Scientology has a positive image in South Africa may be the obvious effectiveness of Scientology’s emergency teams in a country where government-provided disaster relief often finds obstacles in the endemic plague of corruption.

As mentioned earlier, the impression that the anti-cultists did not succeed in tarnishing a generally positive image of Scientology in South Africa was confirmed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In Šorytė’s research of 2020, several examples were offered of activities in South Africa that were both regarded as

effective and generated a favorable media coverage. For example, in Rand West City, in the South African province of Gauteng, Scientology Volunteer Ministers disinfected the Public Safety Department in Randfontein and Westonaria (the two municipalities whose merger resulted in Rand West City), the Rand West City Civic Centre, the Old Westonaria Municipal Offices, the Randgate Clinic, the Westonaria Shelter for the Homeless, and the Westonaria Library. In the Gauteng province, Scientology mobilized 233 Volunteer Ministers, split in 18 teams. In the Johannesburg area, Volunteer Ministers decontaminated several fire stations, and the city of Johannesburg entered into an agreement with them to systematically disinfect all local taxis. Also in South Africa, Korekile Home for Cerebral Palsied Children, in Simunye, was disinfected by Scientology Volunteer Ministers, who donated gloves to the children. In Mogale City, the disinfection involved parts of the City Hall, the local library, the Munsieville Centre for the Aged and Disabled, Munsieville Stadium, and ThuroLefa Secondary School. In fact, Scientology Volunteers became so popular in South Africa that criminals falsely claiming to be Volunteer Ministers showed up at private homes' doors pretending to be there to sanitize them (Šorytė 2020, 28–30).

Scientology has now released statistics about its global anti-COVID work in South Africa. More than one billion square meters of essential infrastructure were sanitized by is Volunteer Ministers. They included community clinics, hospitals, public transport hubs, nursing homes, children's shelters, government offices and more. More than 1.3 million public transport vehicles were sanitized, including buses and taxis. Over 1.3 million educational booklets on hygiene education and illness prevention were distributed in English, Zulu, Sesotho, and Xhosa, the most widely used South African languages (personal interviews, Cape Town, South Africa, December 8 and 9, 2023).

One may object that these statistics come from Scientology itself, but this work was recognized with over three hundred recognitions and awards from government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and others. This included recognitions from the African Union, the South African National Disaster Management Center, and the national Deputy Minister for Social Development.

After COVID, the sequence disaster – effective intervention of Scientology Volunteer Ministers – overwhelmingly positive media coverage repeated itself in South Africa several times. During the social unrest in July 2021, Scientology

Volunteer Ministers cleaned up and restored infrastructures across the Gauteng province. In January 2022, a devastating fire consumed a large part of the Parliament Building in Cape Town. Scientology Volunteer Ministers were amongst the first on the ground, working with firefighters and other first responders. In April 2022, torrential rains hit the city of Durban and surrounding areas in the KwaZulu-Natal Province. Scientology Volunteer Ministers travelled to the affected sites immediately, assisting rescuers in searching and finding survivors, distributing supplies and, very importantly, providing social and spiritual supportive counseling to traumatized victims. For this work, Scientology Volunteer Ministers received an award from the Departments of Health and Social Development.

In January 2023, after a devastating gas tanker explosion on Christmas' Eve 2022 in Boksburg, in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality, in Gauteng, had all but destroyed an entire hospital ward, killing more than a dozen nurses and patients, Scientology Volunteer Ministers worked with the Department of Health to provide social and spiritual trauma support to those who lost loved ones and colleagues. A formally signed partnership with the Department of Health followed, to provide support in similar cases to frontline health workers who often get affected themselves by trauma, depression, and grief (personal interviews, Cape Town, South Africa, December 8 and 9, 2023).

As a result of these activities, Scientology-related disaster relief and educational agencies have signed partnership agreements with different South African national and local governmental agencies (Church of Scientology in South Africa 2023, 23)—something that would be difficult to conceive, say, in France.

Non-Scientists Who Are Scientology Volunteer Ministers

Another reason explaining why, unlike in other countries, a large part of the South African media coverage of Scientology's volunteer activity is positive is something that is true everywhere but, for whatever reason, proved easier to be understood by media and public agencies in South Africa than elsewhere. There are more Scientology Volunteer Ministers in South Africa, as in other countries, than there are Scientologists. This is because you do not need to be a Scientologist to be a Scientology Volunteer Minister. You need to be trained,

mostly by Scientologists, according to principles ultimately reflecting the ideas of Hubbard—but during this training nobody would ask you to “convert” to Scientology. There are more than 25,000 Scientology Volunteer Ministers in South Africa. Most of them are *not* Scientologists and indeed many, including pastors and other clergy, were trained as a result of agreements between the Church of Scientology and other religious bodies.

That the courses are not regarded as proselytization tools for Scientology is confirmed by the fact that the Church of Scientology has entered into formal and informal partnership agreements with several individual religious communities (including The Revelation Spiritual Home) and religious and spiritual umbrella organizations. They include the South African Christian Minister Council (with over six hundred member churches in seven out of the nine South African provinces), the African Religious and Traditional Leaders Council, the South African Traditional Healers Organization, the government-sponsored Faith Based Organization, and the Council of Churches of South Africa International. The latter (COCSAI) is a different organization from the South African Council of Churches, which is better known historically for its political involvement. COCSAI has some five hundred member churches, most of them of a conservative orientation. Overall, 350 organizations in South Africa, most of them religious, have entered into some sort of partnership agreement or cooperation with Scientology Volunteer Ministers (personal interviews, Cape Town, South Africa, December 8 and 9, 2023; we have also examined the written texts of the agreements discussed in this paragraph).

Interfaith Work: The Tools for Life Course Comes to South Africa

Scientologists we interviewed in South Africa insisted that the main reason they developed a work with other religious bodies is not protection from anti-cult attacks, which are not one of their main concerns in the country—at least for the time being. They have been happy to participate in the AFRLS and in other initiatives developed by Evangelical Christians to promote religious liberty, but they mostly originated in South Africa from groups that regard themselves as more immediately threatened. The reason Scientologists engage in interfaith activities in South Africa, they told us, has much more to do with a reflection on the endemic problems of the country, corruption and criminality, inspired by the

principles taught by their founder Hubbard. He believed that crime and corruption cannot be fought through punishment and police only.

Repression will not succeed if morality is not internalized by most citizens. Religions have an essential role in this process leading to internalize morality and integrity. Materialism alone would never create law-abiding citizens, Hubbard insisted. Thus, while Scientologists obviously believe that the path (or “technology,” as they prefer to call it) offered by Hubbard is the best way to individual and social happiness, they are also persuaded that reinforcing the presence of religion in society in general promotes the public well-being.

In practice, this aim is pursued in South Africa by offering to all religions willing to participate in the program (as well as to non-religious social actors) something called *Tools for Life* (Hubbard 2011). The “Tools” are nineteen courses corresponding to the nineteen parts of Hubbard’s *The Scientology Handbook* (Hubbard 1993; see also Hubbard 1976), presented in a way that does not require that students embrace the religious principles of Scientology. They are only taught practical skills on how to better communicate, manage their congregations, solve conflicts inside and between religious communities, and help their parishioners who experience difficulties. Since many churches and religions lost members in South Africa (as in other countries) who stopped attending services during the COVID-19 lockdowns and did not come back when restrictions were lifted, how to contact them and bring them back to the fold is also discussed when teaching these courses.

The *Tools for Life* course is available in South Africa in English, Zulu, Xhosa, and Sesotho but other African languages are being added. As of the end of 2023, more than 4,000 religious leaders including archbishops, bishops, pastors, priests, and traditional healers graduated from the *Tools for Life* course (personal interviews, Johannesburg, South Africa, January 18, 2023; Cape Town, South Africa, December 8 and 9, 2023).

A content analysis of the *Tools for Life* materials used in South Africa reveals that their aim is to improve the effectiveness of those who take the course in three basic areas: communication skills, social and spiritual support, and community resources with a particular focus on the post-COVID-19 context.

Those familiar with the ideas of L. Ron Hubbard know that he believed that a key to successful interpersonal relationships is what he called the ARC Triangle.

The letters ARC stand for Affinity – Reality – Communication. Affinity is the positive emotional relationship we establish with others. Reality is the agreement we reach with others about how things are. Communication is the most important part of the triangle: through communication, we socially construct reality and, once reality is consensually shared, we can generate affinity.

Hubbard also believed that communication often fails because of our bad habit of not to stop and pause when we come across a word we do not understand. A basic technology taught in *Tools for Life* is “word clearing.” Hubbard taught that

A misunderstood word will remain misunderstood until one clears the meaning of the word. Once the word is fully understood by the person, it is said to be cleared... The procedures used to locate and clear up words the student has misunderstood in his studies are called Word Clearing. The first thing to learn is the exact procedure to clear any word or symbol one comes across in reading or studying that he does not understand (Hubbard 2011, 14; see Hubbard 2008, 66–74).

Once basic communication skills have been learned, the next step is teaching students how to use them to better organize their communities and help community members that experience specific problems, listed in seven categories: gender-based violence, grief and trauma, anger, depression and failure, stress and anxiety, exhaustion and burn-out, self-doubt and lack of self-confidence. Obviously, learning how to talk effectively with those who are in these situations suppose that the student has achieved a good level of communication skills, to which basic organizational principles are added (Hubbard 2011).

In the South African context, a practical application of the skills acquired is taught under the name of “holistic community health and safety program”, whose aim is

to use the organizational and communication skills learnt in the *Tools for Life* training to provide effective high-end sanitization of the high-traffic community facilities mitigating the spread of illnesses, such as Covid-19, common seasonal, and childhood illnesses (Church of Scientology in South Africa 2023, 19).

Students who undertake the *Tools for Life* course are mentored by graduates who have already successfully completed the program. While they closely monitor the students, they do not explain or interpret the information for them but refer them to the appropriate course materials, suggesting re-reading the texts several times if needed. To develop communication skills, mock presentations are organized

where one student acts as the presenter and others as the audience. The audience is encouraged to ask “difficult” questions and the presenter to answer by keeping calm and never telling the audience that they are wrong, or their questions are inappropriate (Church of Scientology in South Africa 2023, 5).

To learn the all-important “word clearing” techniques, students are paired in teams. Their overseer makes sure that they do not move to the next step (or “drill”) until they have achieved the results of the current step (Church of Scientology in South Africa 2023, 14). At the close of the workshop, students are asked to write an “After Workshop Report” (Church of Scientology in South Africa 2023, 5).

Although to the best of our knowledge this criticism has not been raised in South Africa, in other countries there have been objections and even court cases claiming that companies that use Hubbard’s technology to improve the communication and organizational skills of their employees violate the religious liberty of those of them who are not Scientologists, by exposing them to the teachings of the religion of Scientology. These objections are, based on our observation of the activities in South Africa, unfounded. In the *Tools for Life* course there is no attempt to convert students to Scientology and there are no references to Scientology as a religion or to its theological principles, although it is clearly stated (but not particularly emphasized) that the secular and non-denominational principles taught in the program were developed by Hubbard.

We did interview South African religious leaders who took the course. None of them felt that their faith was threatened, or the aim was to persuade participants to join Scientology—although, not surprisingly, by participating in the project they developed personal friendships with Scientologists.

The *Tools for Life* countries is strictly connected with the Volunteer Ministers program. The overseers are normally Volunteer Ministers and many non-Scientologists who take the course decide to become Volunteer Ministers themselves (without joining the Church of Scientology).

South African Scientologists' Motivations

In the long article—in fact, almost a book—that French scholar Bernadette Rigal-Cellard wrote in 2019 about Scientology's interaction with other social actors, she proposed a distinction between

three major types of interfaith activities: 1, advocacy through international religious freedom conferences and interfaith religious services; 2, disaster relief operations; 3, better living and peace campaigns in socially deprived and violent areas (Rigal-Cellard 2019, 89).

Advocating for religious freedom is always considered by Scientologists as a key part of their human rights endeavors. They have also learned that they can be hit by unexpected attacks at any time. For this reason, South African Scientologists have embraced with enthusiasm the promotion of a religious freedom alliance that mostly originated from members of The Revelation Spiritual Home and the Family Federation/Unification Church and led to the establishment of the already mentioned African Forum for Religious Liberty and Spirituality (AFRLS). Interestingly, in her article Rigal-Cellard discusses the importance of the international activities on behalf of interfaith religious liberty advocacy by French Scientology leader Eric Roux (Rigal-Cellard 2019, 92–4). Roux was one of the speakers at the AFRLS launching meeting in Cape Town on December 8, 2023.

Disaster relief is a difficult activity that Scientology is well aware its volunteers cannot effectively perform alone. Yet another reason its Volunteer Ministers enjoy a positive image in South Africa has been their willingness to cooperate with other disaster relief organizations, including some whose religious ideas may be far away from their own.

The South African interfaith work we have discussed in this paper mostly belongs to the third category of Rigal-Cellard's typology: promoting a better living in “socially deprived and violent areas.” Unfortunately, a large part of South Africa can be classified into this category. There, the activity of Scientology volunteers in cooperation with both Christian and non-Christian religious organizations parallels the work with African American churches and with the Nation of Islam encountered by Rigal-Cellard during her fieldwork in the United States (Rigal-Cellard 2019, 99–104).

Her conclusion that according to many qualified witnesses the Scientologists' interfaith work does not lead to devotees of other religions converting to

Scientology—nor is this its purpose—but improves the situation in socially deprived neighborhoods also applies to South Africa.

Of course, if proselytization is not their aim, the question remains why Scientologists in South Africa do engage in such a massive volunteer and interfaith work. Scientologists we interviewed answered that they do it to make our planet a better place and because they firmly believe that what they call the “technology” developed by L. Ron Hubbard may alleviate the suffering of their fellow human beings. Critics insist that for “cults” charitable activities are always a form of propaganda.

Rigal-Cellard did note that,

with their yellow jackets the Scientologist rescue teams made sure to be far more visible on photos or on television than other teams and to use their presence as a proselytizing tool. Scientologists will say the bright color is to signal to victims or other helpers where they are for extra support. Indeed, all disaster relief volunteers do wear specific colors or logos in order to be located easily by victims or by the other members of their groups or by coordinators, since each team is specialized in one form of relief. In any case, the issue betrays the age-old ambiguity of humanitarian aid, inextricably altruistic and *pro domo* (Rigal-Cellard 2019, 88).

Obviously, humanitarian aid always benefits the image of those providing it, which does not mean that it is ineffective and only offered for propaganda purposes. Caritas International, the Roman Catholic relief agency, is well-known for its prompt intervention and effectiveness, yet there is little doubt that its action also promotes a positive image of the Catholic Church, something that is particularly needed today when the church is criticized because of moral scandals or controversial political statements by the Pope. The same can be said for the large relief agencies of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, popularly known as the Mormon Church, and many other religious charities. Are they active to help the needy or to promote the image of their parent religious organizations? Our answer is that they do both at the same time, and this is somewhat normal and unavoidable.

We may broaden the argument by observing that this is also true for governments. The largest development agency in the world is USAID. It is not operated by a church or religion but by the government of the United States. Other countries, including China and (at least before the war in Ukraine) Russia, also sent teams around the world to help with COVID and other emergencies,

and invested money in humanitarian aid and support to development in poorer countries. While in some cases the propaganda and perhaps even espionage purposes of these missions is obvious, in many others effective aid is provided by both national governments and international institutions. Is this a form of “soft power” or genuine international solidarity? It is, in most cases, both.

Our point is not that the Church of Scientology, in South Africa as elsewhere, operates for “pure” humanitarian purposes and its motivations do not include the promotion of the good image of the church. All organizations, large and small, religious or political, churches and governments, not to mention large private corporations that also provide aid in case of disasters, both mobilize the altruistic and humanitarian feelings of their members, citizens, donors, and volunteers *and* make sure that who provides the aid is acknowledged, reaping benefits in terms of image and prestige. This is part of how social processes develop, and if only anonymous help and donations were allowed, the needy would receive much less than they currently do. What is unfair is that, while the world of volunteerism and humanitarian help follows the same general rules everywhere, only “cults,” and Scientology in particular, are singled out and accused to act for dubious motivations.

A vicious circle is thus created. If groups stigmatized as “cults” are not particularly active in charitable activities, they are accused of being anti-social and self-absorbed into an obsessive care of their own growth only. But if, as Scientology does, they develop an impressive network of charitable and volunteer activities, they are accused of doing this for purposes of propaganda and self-aggrandizement.

Annoying as they may be, in the eyes of the Scientologists these attacks are merely a distraction in what they see as a cosmic battle to rescue the planet. As for the outside observers, the fact that Scientology's good work sometimes goes unreported (but less so in South Africa) is both a confirmation of how persistent prejudices are against certain religious minorities, and something that should slowly be changed by studying how, as suggested by American scholar Donald Westbrook, “ordinary Scientologists,” rather than cultivating controversies, operate in ways that are not so much different from members of older religions (Westbrook 2018).

The interfaith work, including the *Tools for Life* courses, certainly affirms the public image of the Church of Scientology in South Africa as an organization that

has developed effective techniques to solve different social problems. At the same time, we see no reason to doubt the claims by our South African interviewees, both Scientologists and pastors and leaders of other religions, that the aim of these activities and courses is not to convert local congregation of other religious traditions into churches of Scientology or public relations agents of the church. It is to help them, through what Scientologists believe are uniquely effective organizational and communication tools, to perform in a better way their usual activities, ultimately creating an environment beneficial to all religions. Some may even be helped to sell more effectively a Korean soft drink.

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